COLONEL JIM—A CHARMING STORY OF MODERN AUTOMOBILING DAYS

IT was the smoke room of the Cosmopolitan Club, in Piccadilly.

I had strolled in for the want of something better to do, and without any thought or idea of anything or anybody.

There were only about half a dozen members present, to one only of whom —Charlie Maxwell, in his pre-nuptial days an inveterate globe trotter, as I myself still was—I was personally known.

I just nodded to him, as I saw that he was engaged in conversation with an individual whom I never remembered to have seen at the club before.

Though he was sitting back in the depths of a big armchair, I gathered that he was tall and athletically built. His hair and heavy mustache were snowy white, yet his features had that look of perpetual youth about them which some men retain to the close even of patriarchal life.

But it was not so much the wonderful youthfulness of the man (I reckoned him to be at least sixty years of age) as the almost womanly expression of tenderness in his eyes that attracted me. It did not detract one iota from his manliness; it simply supplied the one thing necessary to make that manliness perfect and complete.

I was on the point of leaving when there entered the room a man for whom I, in common with most of the club members, had an unmitigated dislike.

Coarse of speech, ostentatiously vulgar in his manner, and, in fact, an absolute "impossible" from the social point of view, it was a perennial source of wonder with everybody how he could ever have been admitted to "Cosmopolitan" membership.

It was rumored that he was the millionaire son of a deceased East-end "ready-made" tailor of Semitic descent, and that he owed his admission among us to the largely exerted influence of a certain impecunious peer, his great friend, and one of the original promoters of the club.

The truth of this could not be exactly proved, although after events showed that for once rumor did not act up to its reputation for lying.

Almost immediately after this very estimable individual's entrance—his name, by the way, was Marcus Dischman—my friend Maxwell came across to where I stood looking out of the window into Piccadilly, and shook hands, asking me to excuse him for ten minutes, and saying that he would have a chat with me on his return. Complete silence reigned in the room after Maxwell's departure, broken only by the rustle of newspapers or an occasional cough.

Then I was suddenly startled by the voice of Dischman, raised in loud altercation.

I turned sharply round, and saw that he was standing, straddle-legged, in front of the white-haired gentleman's chair, wagging his head and forefinger in time to a stream of angry abuse.

"You've monopolized that paper ever since I've been in the room, and for how long before, goodness only knows! Do you think you've bought the place, just because you've been in the army?"

The occupant of the armchair rose up out of it to his full height of well over six feet, and calmly laid down the paper he had been reading on the table beside him.

It was then that I noticed for the first time that his right sleeve was empty, indicating the loss of his arm.

"Sir," he said, with quiet irony, "it is evident to me that you have not been in the army, inasmuch as the officer invariably implies the gentleman."

The retort might have been injudicious but it was certainly richly deserved.

Furious with passion Dischman extended his arm, and violently shook the empty sleeve pinned up to the lapel of the other's coat.

"You dare to taunt me! You!" he shrieked. "How came you by this? Not in battle! No! Do you think I have not heard of a certain gentleman's little affair with a certain young lady? The motor-car ride to Brighton!—too much champagne!—a spill!—and a smashed arm? Do you think I don't know? Bah! you got your deserts, Mr. Officer and gentleman!"

The rest of us thought it high time now to interfere, for the wretched cad was evidently contemplating further violence.

The matter, however, was suddenly taken out of our hands.

Unseen by me, Maxwell had come into the room, and had heard the frantic speech of Dischman.

As the last word left the bully's mouth Maxwell's hand was on his collar, and his knuckles pressing uncomfortably upon his collar bone.

Swinging the fellow round, he didn't speak to him, but summoning a waiter, bid him call the club secretary.

Held securely in Maxwell's grip, Dischman looked the picture of vulgar discomfiture.

"Mr. Shaw," said Maxwell to the secretary when he appeared, "I take the responsibility of demanding from you this man's instant expulsion. He has not only grossly insulted Colonel Fergusson, resorting even to personal violence, but by so doing on the club premises has insulted also every member of it. If you do not accede to my request, I, and, I think, every right-minded and self-respecting member will immediately send in our resignations."

Maxwell slightly loosened his hold while addressing the secretary, enabling Dischman to shake himself free.

With one glance of scorching hate at his late captor, Dischman, not waiting for the secretary's decision, walked out of the room, and of the club, which latter he has never again entered since that day.

Colonel Fergusson, far from being upset or disturbed by what had occurred, had quietly resumed his seat and his paper.

"Talbot," said Maxwell, "allow me to introduce you to Colonel James Fergusson, D. S. O., late Dragoon Guards; but known to all who love him as 'Colonel Jim.' Colonel, my old friend Archie Talbot, whom I haven't seen for all the years he has been wandering about the earth."

"Mr. Talbot, pleased to know you; though I warn you to take everything Charlie Maxwell has to say about me with a very large grain of salt."

If when silent he was attractive, in conversation he was delightful. What I subsequently learned about him from Maxwell, especially concerning one particular episode of his life, did not in the least surprise me; it simply served to perfect the picture of the noblest man and truest-hearted gentleman that it has ever been my lot to meet.

It was one evening, after a bachelor dinner at Maxwell's house—his wife being in Scotland on a family visit—that my friend told me the true story of the incident, in the course of which "Colonel Jim" had lost his arm, and as a result of which he had to retire from the service in the heydey of a most distinguished career.

"Perhaps you don't know," said Maxwell, "that Fergusson and I were in the same regiment. He was full major when I joined as second lieutenant.

"Though there was a good fifteen years' difference of age between us, we became stanch friends. Without being grandmotherly, Fergusson kept me from all sorts of tomfooleries, such as hot-headed young officers are so apt to indulge in.

"Our colonel was Harvey Fane, now a major general and a K. C. B., with a large family of daughters, and his house was an attractive center for bachelor officers, eligible and ineligible.

"It was not long before I discovered that Beatrix Fane was more to me than all the other girls of my acquaintance.

"Very soon, too, I was successful in getting her assurance that I, in like manner, was the veritable 'fairy prince.'

"Of course I confided in Colonel Jim, who, though sympathetic, advised a wise waiting until at any rate I succeeded to the property which I inherited six years ago.

"Attached to the regiment was a certain Captain Holroyd, who was said to be connected in some way with a monster firm of East end clothiers. Anyway he was very unpopular with all ranks.

"Quite accidentally I heard, the day after the recent affair at the Cosmopolitan, that Holroyd was Dischman's cousin, hence the fact of the former's knowledge of what I am going to tell you about 'Colonel Jim.'

"This man Holroyd was an inveterate gambler, and nearly always won. It so happened that when I came into the Wharton estate there was a large accumulation of ready money which I immediately proceeded to spend in right royal style. Holroyd, ever on the scent for a pigeon to pluck, suddenly became very friendly with me, and one day invited me to pass a week with him at Brighton. Glad of a change, and having easily obtained leave, I left Aldershot with Holroyd without acquainting 'Colonel Jim' of my intention.

"As a matter of fact, I knew perfectly well what would be his advice, and, therefore, I evaded it. I did not even tell Beattie, but wrote her on my arrival at Brighton.

"All went well until the third day, except that I lost heavily at bridge to Holroyd when, after a dinner to which Holroyd had invited two or three other men, we all adjourned for an hour's stroll on the pier.

"Whether it was that, being unused to excessive indulgence in wine, I had taken too much champagne, or whether I was seized with sudden illness, I cannot exactly say. I only know that by some unaccountable means I managed to fall from the pier into the sea, getting a nasty smack through coming into contact with one of the iron cross-girders.

"I remembered nothing more till I found myself alone in my Brighton lodging, wretchedly ill, and very much ashamed of myself.

"The doctor who attended me, a splendid fellow, told me that Holroyd had returned to Aldershot without troubling to find out my real condition.

"That night late, a further surprise was in store for me. Beattie, accompanied by Colonel Jim, the latter with a seriously injured arm, arrived at my diggings in Warrior Square.

"It was soon apparent that Colonel Jim was in a bad way, my doctor, after a brief examination of the injured arm, declaring that immediate amputation was necessary.

"All the time I was in absolute ignorance of how the accident had happened or how it was that Beattie had come to Brighton in Colonel Jim's company.

"It was not until the operation was over, and Mrs. Fane, who was wired for at once, had arrived to look after her wandering daughter, that I learned the whole story from Beattie's lips.

"As some little explanation of what took place, let me say that both Colonel Fane and Colonel Jim were ardent motorists, each possessing a twelve horse-power Panhard, which they were eternally pitting the one against the other.

"Colonel Jim always drove his car himself, but Colonel Fane, not being so expert, employed a French chauffeur at fabulous wages.

"Well, it seems that the day before I recovered consciousness my landlady who, up to then, had no clue to the whereabouts of my friends, came across a letter of Beattie's while getting some clean linen for me out of my portmanteau. Without stopping to think who the writer might be she at once wrote to her, and, as it afterward appeared, gave a very exaggerated account of my condition.

"When my landlady's letter arrived the colonel's motor was waiting at the door for him on his return from parade.

"Without pause or thought my foolish, loving litle girl imperiously ordered the driver to set off for Brighton there and then, silencing his objections with threats of her father's displeasure if he disobeyed her.

"Was there ever such a mad journey, a journey, too, at which her social world would hold up its hands in holy horror.

"On through Guildford, Tunbridge Wells, Horsham, till the outskirts of Lewes were reached. And there the trouble began.

"The chauffeur had insisted more than once on descending at certain inns and refreshing himself with brandy.

"By the time Lewes was in sight the man was in a state of semi-intoxication, and was quite incapable of controlling the machine.

"Chancing to turn her head at this point, Beattie saw coming up behind them at racing speed half a mile or so astern, another motor, which, even at that distance, seemed strangely familiar to her.

"Nearer and nearer it drew, the stupefied Frenchman in charge of the leading car becoming more and more unable to steer it.

"It was at a bend in the road that the catastrophe happened.

"On the right hand was a high bank, and into this the driver made to run Beattie's car.

"By a miracle of mercy he could not turn the steering wheel, over-balancing himself and falling out under the wheels in front, which passed over his body.

"Though bewildered and panic-stricken, Beattie caught hold of the gear with both trembling hands and tried to keep the car straight. What would have been the result of her efforts it is hard to say, though it is almost morally certain that in the streets of Lewes she would inevitably have come to grief.

"Now for Colonel Jim's part in it.

"Putting on the pace for a final spurt, he raced alongside of the runaway, managed to stop his own machine, at the same moment leaping on to the other one.

"Seizing the steering wheel with his left hand—his right arm was broken on the leap—he wrenched it around and brought the car to a full stop.

"Then appeared the representative of the law, who, running back, discovered that the chauffeur was fatally injured.

"The rest you know, though there is one little thing more which I will tell you in confidence, as it renders, from my point of view, all that Colonel Jim did that day the more heroic.

"Beattie told me, more than a year after we were married, that some words that escaped her rescuer's lips as he reached her side in the flying car, convinced her beyond all doubt that he loved her, and that he risked his life for the sake of a woman whom he knew had given her heart to another man.

"How Colonel Jim came to follow after Beattie was owing to a servant at the house, who overheard her orders to the chauffeur, telling him, as he drove up in his own machine directly afterward and inquired for her. He knew that her action would compromise her with her friends and society, and, in her interests, decided to persuade her to come back.

"Of course the dear old fellow had to leave the service, though he has since got his step on the retired list. Now, what do you think of him, Talbot?"

"Think of him" I said. "Why, that for a man among men, I never expect to meet another like 'Colonel Jim.'

"As you certainly never will!" said Maxwell, raising his glass. "Here's to Colonel Jim, and God bless him!"

THE CAPITULATION OF CELIA.

A Love Story.

"DID I tell you that I had asked auntie to come here, Len?"

"No you certainly did not," replied Leonard Vancourt, his forehead lowering into a frown, as he helped himself to a second piece of toast. "Might I inquire which of the two is going to afford us the delirious delight of her presence—Clarissa the saturnine, or Amelia the magpie imitator?"

"Len!" The delicately traced eyebrows were raised in indignant expostulation. "I think that it is particularly unkind of you to speak in that manner of my relations. You used to say that Aunt Amelia was a shrewd business woman."

"I would be the last to deny her that qualification, Celia," remarked Vancourt, grimly. "It was positively a stroke of genius the way the old reptile—ahem—lady palmed off on to me that property in Southwark. Fifteen houses, my dear, with only rudimentary drainage and a hungry county council waiting on me to render the same effective. Aunt Amelia ought to have been a company promoter. Egad! she would have made her fortune at the game—my respected aunt-in-law has it in her bones. Where is the "Daily Express?"

Celia's lip commenced to quiver.

"I think that you are horrid, Len," she vouchsafed at length, glancing reproachfully at her husband, who suddenly became immersed in the money market column of the paper, which he had discovered under the table.

"I must say that I think you are particularly unkind to speak of my relations in the way you always do! You should not forget, dear, that Aunt Clarissa has been more than a mother to me, and brought me up since I was a tiny tot; the first time you ever met me, Len, was at her house."

"I know," replied Vancourt casually. "But if it hadn't been for Gus Harrington taking me to Rutland Gate I should never have seen either of you. I remember the evening well. I took an instinctive dislike to your respected more than a mother or an aunt! A feeling incidentally which has intensified ever since."

"You used to say that you were very fond of her—before we were married, Len."

Vancourt coughed, dryly.

"I was diplomatic, Celia," he said quietly, as laying aside his paper, he buttered a piece of toast. "You see, as I could only see you in her house, I was obliged, in a sort of way, to hold the candle to the—your aunt."

"She was very fond of you, Len." Celia Vancourt's eyes were bent reproachfully on his.

"Ahem! That was very kind of her, dear. You see, Celia, I had shekels; in London society I was considered rather a decent match at the time I married you." His accent was irritatingly sardonic.

"Do you mean to insinuate that Aunt Clarissa liked you because you were well off and had a house in Park Lane?" demanded Celia, her face flushing an angry pink.

"Aunt Amelia did, anyway," smiled Vancourt unfeelingly. "My spare cash made her Southwark property boom in a manner which brought a smile to her face! She had me on toast, Celia."

She rapped her knife impatiently on the immaculate damask. "Leonard," she remarked, with dignity, "I would have you remember that you are speaking of my relations."

"I have no desire to rob you of their ownership, dear," remarked Vancourt; then added, as he commenced his breakfast in real earnest, "I wish to goodness that you would manage to see that we get bacon for breakfast that is not salty enough to skin the inside of one's mouth. I don't believe that the tradesmen would dare to sell such abominable meat to anybody else but us."

Celia's face grew tearful looking as she poured herself out a cup of tea; then, glancing across the table at the somberly annoyed features of her husband, said, irritably:

"I never met such a growling man as you are in my life! The moment anything puts you out you quarrel with your food. Goodness knows, I am fanciful enough, but I don't find this bacon a bit salty."

"Of course not. It is quite sufficient for me to say that it is for you to declare the contrary," said Vancourt, angrily. "I never met such a contradictory woman as you are in the whole course of my existence. I am just about sick of it!"

"And I am tired to death of you and your grumbling," retorted Celia, flushing with anger. "Everything that I do is wrong. I can't make out what on earth made you marry me!"

"Because I was a victim of the throes of driveling lunacy, that's why," said Vancourt, savagely. "I wish now that I had never set eyes on you. Why, ever since my marriage I have never known what it is to have a decent breakfast. If I don't get a high egg I get salt bacon which a sailor would kick at, and if I get neither of those two things I have a piece of fish which would disgrace an East End cook shop put in front of me."

He sniffed indignantly as, turning in his chair, he picked up his discarded paper, and flattening it out angrily, commenced to read its contents.

"Very well, Leonard," said Celia, dignity struggling with tears for mastery in her voice. "Since you are as sorry to have ever met me as I am to have ever come across you I will ask Aunt Clarissa when she comes here——"

"I tell you she isn't coming here!" interrupted Vancourt peremptorily. "I won't have the old cat in the house—so there! I'm master here, kindly remember."

"And I am mistress!" retorted Celia. "So Aunt Clarissa shall come and——"

"What?"

"And when she does I—I shall tell her that—how unkind you are—and—and ask her to take me away," continued Celia in a faltering voice, unheeding his interruption. "I—I never—want to see you again—I hate you!"

"Oh, very well, then." Vancourt rose with as much dignity as he could assume. "As such is the case, and since I am not allowed to be master of my own house, we had better separate amicably. I, for one, shall be very pleased to be freed from a nagging woman!"

"And I, from a—brute!"

"That is a question of opinion," remarked Vancourt easily. "I have been asked by Carstairs to go for a cruise, and as his yacht leaves Southampton the day after tomorrow I may as well go with him until I have decided what I will do. Of course, I shall leave you the house—I will clear out." He crossed the room to the door, adding, as he opened it, "There will be enough money paid into your account to satisfy your requirements." Then, without awaiting a reply, he closed the door behind him, Celia gazing half disconsolately, half defiantly, at the vacant chair on the other side of the table.

Vancourt had not been gone long before he returned, dressed in faultless style, a raglan over his arm, and a bowler in his hand.

"Well, I'll say good-by," he said lightly, extending his hand to his wife. "I've told Job to pack up my duds and to bring them to me at the Carlton. I shall be stopping there till tomorrow morning, when I shall leave for Southampton."

"I see."

"We shall be cruising about the Mediterranean for about two months," he continued, eyeing his wife coverty as he spoke. "After which I may go to South Africa for a few months to do some big game shooting."

"You will enjoy yourself, I hope," said Celia, placing her slim hand in his. "Of course, if we ever meet in society we need not be dead cuts, need we, Leonard?"

Her deep blue eyes were raised almost wistfully to his.

"Of course not," he said with a strained laugh, as, pressing her cold hand in his, he went toward the door. "Adios, little woman, it is a pity that we should go our several ways, don't you think so?"

"Yes, it is! Good-by." Her voice faded away into a whisper, adding quaveringly to herself as the door closed behind her husband, "he might have kissed me before he went. I don't think that—he minded leaving me and I—I—oh, I don't care!" she cried angrily, dashing away the tears which had gathered on her lashes. "If he had tried to kiss me, I'd have slapped his face for him! I hate Leonard, and now that I am free I shall be as happy as——"

The harsh clang of the hall door below caused her to stop abruptly. For a moment Celia stood silent, then, sinking onto a sofa, she buried her fluffy head amid a bevy of cushions, and cried as if her heart would break.

"He's gone!" she muttered in a strangled voice, broken by sobs. "And—I made—sure that he would come—back."

Meanwhile, outside in the street, Leonard Vancourt hailed a hansom, and, stepping into it, was soon bowling in the direction of the Carlton. "I am afraid that I have made a fool of myself," he soliloquized. "I made sure that she would have stopped me before I left the house; of course, it's all most unearthly rot to think for a moment that I could live without my little Celia. A day would be bad enough, but two months—I have half a mind to turn back and say that I was only bluffing, only I should look such an ass if I did. I might have kissed her before I left, though! Poor little girlie, she half raised her face to mine when I said good-by and—oh I am going to chuck this fool's game and shall toddle back, and she can stodge me with high eggs and salt bacon as much as she jolly well likes, if she will only take me on again. Cabby, I——"

His sentence was never finished, for, as he pushed open the trapdoor above his head, the pole of a brewer's dray crashed into the side of the hansom.

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When Leonard Vancourt came to his senses it was to find himself swathed in bandages lying in bed in a darkened and familiar room, while curled up beside him on the immaculate counterpane, sat Celia, her slim fingers cooling his fevered brow.

"Hullo, girlie!" he exclaimed, with a weak attempt at hilarity. "I haven't gone after all, you see."

"Are you sorry, Len, that such is not the case?" she queried gently, nestling her tear-stained cheek against his.

"Would you mind, dearest—I mean—Celia—if I said that I was glad?" he asked slowly.

"Mind! Oh, Len, you are the dearest boy in all the world!" she cried, impulsively. "I thought that you would have come back, but when I found that you did not I just sat down and wrote to the Carlton to ask you to, dear."

"And I hoped that you would call me back, Celia," he said, delightedly. "And when I found that you did not, girlie, I thought that I would just come back and say that you might do any mortal thing you jolly well liked, if you would only take me on again, Celia."

She passed her hand caressingly over his cheek.

"Call me girlie," she whispered, happily. "You know, dearest, how I hate Celia."

"I don't," Vancourt replied, fondly. "I love her better than the whole world! Kiss me, girlie!"

WOMEN OF TASTE.

There is a charm about the neat woman that is as captivating as it is indescribable. Her clothes fit perfectly and they are put on properly. Thus she has an inimitable style that is all her own, and she easily outshines her more beautiful but less natty sister. Her gloves are never soiled or broken and her footwear is in the pink of condition. Her hair reveals attention and care, and her teeth are refreshingly clean.

Among a thousand women you would pick her out as the one who impresses you most favorably, says the "Pittsburg Observer." Her under garments are as clean and well-fitting as her outer ones, and this is one of the secrets of her charming appearance. She does not wear top-heavy-looking hats or long trains on the street like the woman of poor taste does. She never vulgarizes herself by wearing cheap jewelry and her handkerchiefs are always fresh and of nice quality. Consistency characterizes her attire, making her a jewel precious and bright

THE UNSPOKEN ANSWER.

A Revelation of a Woman's Way.

"LOOK here, Digby," observed Guy Maxwell to his chum, with that air of superiority which was peculiar to him, "there's only tomorrow left, and I must arrange to have a few minutes with Miss Lyttleton. She's the sort of girl who would make a fellow a real good wife. I rather think she likes me, and the fact that I am heir to a baronetcy, with a good income attached, will have some weight. I intend to have a try tomorrow."

Digby Grant blew out a cloud of smoke in order to hide the expression that crept over his face.

"That means," said Digby, after a pause, "that you intend to propose to her tomorrow?"

"I don't see what other interpretation you can put on my words!" rejoined Guy, rather irritably. "You don't seem very bright today; you are tired after your walk. Your voice is a bit shaky. Have something to brace you up."

"No, thanks!" said Digby, forcing a laugh. "But go on."

"Well," continued Guy, "I have fallen in love with that girl. My life will not be a happy one if I do not win her! I have mentioned my intention to you, old fellow, because I wish to ask a favor."

"What is it?" inquired Digby, surprised. "I can't help you to win Grace —I ought to say, Miss Grace Lyttleton!"

"Yes, you can!" was the astonishing rejoinder. "I simply want you to keep out of the way. You see," pusued Guy, a trifle awkwardly, "we are always together. Now, I can't propose to her with you by my side, so I want——"

"Oh, I'll clear out for the day!" agreed Digby. "You ought to get a good chance. I'm going to turn in now. You will have tomorrow entirely, and on the following morning we start for town. Good night!"

Digby Grant was not in a pleasant mood when he reached his own bedroom. He, too, was in love with Grace Lyttleton; he had been trying to arrive at a decision as to whether she cared for him or not—whether he would be likely to stand any chance if he proposed. He was not very well off, but nevertheless he could offer her a good home, and he was rising in his profession. Now, at the last moment, Guy had announced his intention of essaying the capture of Grace's hand and heart.

"I can't go behind his back," muttered Digby disconsolately, "so I must stand aside. Is she the sort of girl that would be captivated by the prospect of a title? I hardly think so, yet she may be in love with him, for women like a masterful man."

"I don't see that I have any right to interfere!" groaned Digby. "I must be off early, and go to—somewhere—for the day!"

He was true to his word and Guy Maxwell watched for his opportunity. Miss Lyttleton was staying at the same hotel, where her father had taken a suite of rooms to accommodate himself, his daughter, and his young son, a boy of fourteen. Mr. Lyttleton thought it a bore to be compelled to spend two or three weeks away from his business, so he had letters sent on, and spent a fair proportion of his time in writing his instructions, talking to London on the telephone or reflecting over commercial problems in the smoking-room. Grace and Roy were left much to themselves, which was fortunate from Guy's point of view.

"The boy will be off somewhere, and she will be alone, so far as her relatives are concerned," mused Guy, with great satisfaction. "I can manage to get her to a quiet spot somewhere inside or out, and the thing will be done."

He had to wait some time for his chance during the morning. Other gentlemen appeared to claim a goodly share of her attention, and she was playing tennis in the spacious grounds of the palatial hotel. Roy, too, seemed to be "dodging about," as Guy inelegantly phrased it, more than usual. However, the much desired opportunity presented itself at last, and he found himself alone with Grace Lyttleton.

"May I have the pleasure of a walk and a talk with you in the garden, Miss Lyttleton," he asked gallantly. "You must feel warm after that game, and the flowers are worth seeing. I am going away tomorrow, and I should like this last day of my stay here to be the happiest."

She glanced at him shyly, half frightened, but bowed and said briefly that she would like a walk among the flowers.

"I think she guesses what is coming!" said Guy, exultantly to himself. "That makes my task easier!"

They went into the garden, and, after a few steps he suggested that they should seat themselves on a rustic bench.

In spite of his masterful disposition, Guy felt a little nervous about beginning. He nerved himself, and said:

"Miss Lyttleton, I have asked you to come here because——"

"Oh, here you are!" chimed in a shrill voice. "Nice in here, isn't it? Got room for me?"

And Roy Lyttleton took a seat next to his sister.

"What do you think of Mr. Benson's play, Mr. Maxwell? Not up to much, is it?" asked the boy.

Guy made some kind of reply mechanically. He wished that young gentleman far away, but he had to conceal his annoyance and be pleasant.

Guy Maxwell laid himself out to make another opportunity for the afternoon. He suggested to Roy that there was good scenery for an amateur photographer in the neighborhood of Rookham, about three miles away, and that the day was a perfect one; Roy appeared to catch at the idea, and Guy was hopeful.

Guy felt just a trifle mean at the thought of spying on Miss Lyttleton in order to discover which way she went for a walk, but he did it, and was rewarded by seeing her alone on the cliffs.

"This is a fortunate meeting, Miss Lyttleton!" he declared, raising his hat. "Suppose we go to the base of that cliff? There is a pretty nook, invisible from here, and it would form a pleasant afternoon excursion. Don't you think so?"

Grace Lyttleton murmured that it might be so, but she was afraid to undertake any climbing on account of the fatigue.

"It is really very good of you to take so much trouble to make my stay agreeable, Mr. Maxwell," she said, charmingly, "but I fear that it is a thankless task for you."

She looked at him with a strange expression, which he interpreted favorably. He stretched out his hand to take hers.

"I'm going to Rookham tomorrow or the next day, Mr. Maxwell!" said a well-known voice behind him.

Guy nearly uttered a rude exclamation, but he smothered it and resigned himself to the loss of another opportunity.

The evening alone remained, and Guy vowed that, by hook or by crook, he would have his answer then. There was a ball that evening, so he would certainly get Grace alone at one portion of the entertainment. Roy would be in bed, that was one thing to be thankful for, and old Lyttleton was nobody.

He secured three or four dances, carefully selected by himself for convenient times, and felt certain of victory.

"She knows what to expect!" he murmured several times. "She's shy and restrained, which is a good sign."

When his first dance with her was over he tried to lead her away to the conservatory, but her next partner claimed her.

The second dance was before the interval, so he was safe from the intrusion of the next partner. Without asking her, he led her away to a quiet spot; she appeared reluctant, but he paid no heed. If he lost this chance——!

"Miss Lyttleton—Grace! I must tell you!" he began, losing no time in preliminaries. "I cannot——"

"I say, it's late for me to be up, sis, and dad is cross! Do you think that Mr. Maxwell—— Oh, that is Mr. Maxwell!"

Roy looked as though he had said too much. Guy was on the point of telling him to clear off when Grace spoke:

"I am afraid father will be cross, Roy, but I must take the blame. I'll go and find him and explain. You will excuse me, won't you, Mr. Maxwell?"

She was gone before he had time to realize the fact. He gazed sternly at Roy; if he could get that young rascal out of the way, there would still be a chance after one of the other dances.

"Roy," said Maxwell impressively, "I want to have a quiet talk with your sister, and you come in every time. See here, I'll give you this half crown if you'll go to bed—go anywhere, and leave us!"

Roy's face lighted up and his arm began to stretch itself in the direction of the piece of silver; then his face grew somber, and he shook his head.

"That would be treachery," he explained. "Grace told me this morning that she expected you would try and say something to her if you were with her alone, and she didn't want you to. So she gave me a shilling to keep near her all day, so as you shouldn't have a chance, and I agreed. I'll stick to the bargain, even if I lose by it!"

Maxwell paled.

"Did she tell you why she didn't wish me to speak to her?" he asked, as an idea crossed his mind.

"Yes," admitted the boy. "She said she didn't want to hurt your feelings by saying something you wouldn't like, so it would be better to prevent you from saying anything to her. Girls are funny, aren't they?"

"Roy," said Maxwell, after a pause, "I understand now. I'll give you this half-crown on condition that you say nothing whatever about this chat we've had."

"Done!" exclaimed the boy, and the money changed hands.

"So that's my answer!" groaned Maxwell, as he made his way to his room. "Yet it was kindly on her part to wish to spare me a refusal. A refusal! H'm! That must be pretty uncomfortable for a man to hear when he expects to be accepted! Yes, it was a strange way of doing it, but a well-meaning way. Now I understand her apparently shy glances. I'm off by the earliest train tomorrow. I wonder if she is in love and whom she loves?"

This question was answered six weeks later by the announcement in the newspaper of the engagement of Miss Grace Lyttleton and Mr. Digby Grant, the rising young barrister.